

# Unwrapping the Ultimate Christmas Gift

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I want you to take your Bibles this morning and open them, if you would, to Galatians chapter 4.

That will be our text for this morning. And as you noticed on the screen behind me, our text will be the first seven verses of that chapter. Galatians chapter 4, verses 1 through 7.

And I'm going to wait just a little bit before I read the passage. So you can just hold it there open, and we'll get to it in just a moment.

I'm sure you are like me. You love Christmas. I love this time of the year. I certainly do. And there are so many different elements of it that I love.

And one of those would be a beautifully wrapped Christmas tree with beautifully wrapped packages, gifts, all underneath.

[ 1 : 12 ] You know, just kind of piled underneath. And, of course, you know, over the years, because I've got four boys, of course, the older they get, you know, the less this becomes true.

But I can remember when they were all little, there'd be so many packages under the tree, they wouldn't all fit, you know. And some of you are still experiencing that kind of thing now. And you remember those days.

But just something about that whole scene, you know, the lights on the tree and the decoration and then all of those beautiful packages underneath. And I will have to admit to you, and I might as well, we ought to be honest with one another.

And I think you would agree with this when I say that we love to receive gifts. Now, it's, you know, we love to give them too, right? Surely we do.

Sometimes we don't mean that as much as we'd like people to think that we mean it. You know, more blessed to give than to receive. And I hear that a lot this time of the year.

[ 2 : 16 ] But the bottom line is we all like to receive gifts too, right? All right? Right? You might as well just be honest.

There you go, Albert. Thank you. And also, sometimes we have no idea whatsoever what that gift is going to be. B, we might have an idea about it.

Sometimes we don't have any idea about it. You know, you may be like me. When I'm asked, I say, oh, I don't really need anything or I don't care, whatever, you know.

And so come Christmas morning, sometimes we don't have any idea what's inside that package.

But days before, when we see the package under the tree, and I know that many of the younger people relate to this, we just have this almost dominating curiosity to find out what's inside that present.

To try to even guess what's wrapped inside. And we'll pick it up, you know, and we'll kind of feel how heavy it is. And we're more pleased when it's heavy, right?

[ 3 : 27 ] And you remember this when you were a kid, and maybe you still do it. We'll shake it. Try to get some kind of idea about what's inside of that beautifully wrapped package, you know, before Christmas morning comes.

And that's part of the anticipation. You know, that's part of the fun. To anticipate what's inside that gift. The whole guessing kind of scenario that we love to engage in.

To find out, see if we can guess what's in it. And we'll say to ourselves, I wonder what it is. Just wonder what it is. And I hope it's what I wanted. Even though I didn't tell anybody what I wanted.

I hope it's what I wanted. And I hope I'm not disappointed. Right? You understand this whole psyche about the Christmas holiday leading up to Christmas morning.

And, of course, sometimes we are disappointed. You ever had that experience? Christmas? Kind of disappointed. Maybe not with everything that we receive, but maybe one particular gift that we got

from uncle so-and-so, our aunt so-and-so, you know.

[ 4 : 43 ] Four or five times removed. You know, some gift that was given. We opened it up and we were disappointed. Because sometimes people we love, people we know, will give us a really bad Christmas gift.

You ever had one of those? Right? Well, let me give you a few examples. For example, how about Hobbit house shoes for the ladies?

I hope that's not in store for some of you come Christmas morning. And if not that, for the guys, how about ugly ties? The proverbial ugly ties. Of course, I hesitated even using this illustration because who wears ties anymore except the preacher?

So I did notice Dan had a tie on this morning, Christmas tie. Lee, everyone, Lee, you have a tie on? All right, he's got his tie on. I can't see it. But, you know, that's the proverbial bad Christmas gift. But it gets worse. How about an electric bugaloo? I mean, it looks like it would be pretty convenient, pretty handy.

[ 5 : 56 ] You've got a little bug crawling on the wall. And you know how hard it is to, you know, kind of swat those things. And when you do swat it, then what do you have left on the wall?

So here's a vacuum cleaner for bugs. I can't imagine what it would be like to empty the thing after it's full, you know. Not a good Christmas gift. Or this one I saw on TV the other day, a leather-wrapped rock.

I saw this on TV the other day. It really exists. I'm not making this up. In fact, it was sold. You could have, I say could have, bought one for that special one in your life.

Bought it from Nordstrom for \$85. \$85. And I say you could have because they're all sold out. You imagine thousands of people are going to wake up Christmas morning and open their special present. And inside is a leather-wrapped rock. Not a good Christmas gift.

[ 7 : 00 ] I thought about getting this for Chris. Beard bells. Actually, I think he probably would like that. And for the physical fitness people among us, you know, finger fitness trainer.

Actually, some of you probably think, well, that wouldn't be a bad, maybe a bad kind of gift to get on Christmas Day. But that's really not a good Christmas gift. And what little boy and girl among us would not like to have a shark bait sleeping bag?

Isn't that terrible? Huh? Well, maybe some of you think that might be neat, and especially some of the kids that are still among us here this morning. And I hope I don't offend anyone here.

And so, in advance, please forgive me for this one, but a racing granny wind-up toy. Okay. I'm not making this up. This really exists.

All right? In fact, I saw a picture. It was a picture of a nursing home. And they were grouped around a table, and they each had one of these, and they were having a race across the table.

[ 8 : 16 ] Or for the guys here, Oscar Mayer bacon gift set. And actually, that didn't sound too bad to me. I guess you keep it in the refrigerator.

I don't know. But it does come with a few little extra things, like a little pair of pliers or money clip or something like that. And for the treasure hunters among us, treasure seekers sandals, complete with metal detectors, you know, that are wired to your sandals.

And you can just walk around and beep. Look down there. There might be a quarter or something of value there. And then for those who spend far too much time in the restroom, Sudoku toilet tissue.

Some of you are laughing. I bet some of you have this. All right. And then last but not least, for those who have to get up in the middle of the night and go to the restroom maybe too often and don't want to turn on a light, the glow in the dark toilet seat.

Now, enough of that foolishness. These are really but a few of the really bad Christmas gifts that you should not give this Christmas.

[ 9 : 32 ] And if you've already bought it and it's wrapped in under the tree, then you might consider taking it back and getting something else. And I hope that you don't receive a gift like this this Christmas.

But seriously, this morning. I do want to talk about a Christmas gift.

A particular Christmas gift. And, you know, this context, this is a church and I'm preaching and I'm a preacher and when I preach from God's word, you know what gift that is.

And I want to kind of unwrap it. Kind of unwrap this, what I would call, the ultimate Christmas gift.

And I think most of us in this room know, we should all know, that this gift, the gift I want us to focus

on and think about this morning.

This gift is the reason that we have a holiday. This holiday that we're celebrating. Though sometimes we forget about it. So many other things kind of crowd into our minds and into our lives this time of the year.

[10:50] That we forget that it's all based upon this particular gift that was given to us. And hopefully all of us in this room have received this very special Christmas gift.

And really this gift is the reason we have this tradition. Don't we? This time of the year, giving and receiving of gifts. Now, Paul, in our text for this morning, I'm going to read it here in just a moment, is telling us about this ultimate gift.

This ultimate Christmas gift. He tells us why this gift was given. He tells us where this gift came from and who the gift giver was.

He tells us in this passage what this gift consists of. And finally tells us what this gift means to those who have received it.

All of that is in this passage. And so placing our focus on this ultimate gift, this ultimate Christmas gift, is really the only right way to celebrate this holiday that we call Christmas.

[12:05] And so let's look at it. Galatians chapter 4, verses 1 through 7. And I'm reading, of course, from the New King James Version.

Now, I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

So this begins with an illustration. Even so, we, when we were children, really the word is infants, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his son into your hearts, crying out, Abba, Father. Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son.

[13:25] And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Isn't that a wonderful passage of Scripture? It really is a marvelous passage to be preached during this time of the year.

Because it speaks of a gift. It speaks of a gift. It speaks of a time. And so I want us to focus, though there is a lot in this passage that we could not possibly cover in our time together this morning, I want us to focus on the gift.

The gift that is given. And there are two things to consider. So two points to my message this morning. This gift is both timely and timeless.

Now just remember that about the gift. Then we'll flesh this out under those two points. This gift is timely and it is timeless. So let's begin with the first one.

This ultimate gift is first a timely gift. It's a timely gift. What did Paul say in verse 4? He said, but when the fullness of the time, the time had come.

[14:37] God sent forth his son. So he speaks here of a time and he speaks really of a gift. And we'll talk more about both of those here in just a moment.

But Paul's talking about a timely gift. And you know, it's a great thing to get a timely gift when a gift is timely. I mean, it's just exactly what we need and it's just given at the right time, perfect time.

And that is true of this gift for sure. And so it is a timely gift, I would say, first of all, because of man's grievous position as a sinner.

That's really where we need to begin. This is where Paul begins. It's a timely gift, this gift that God has given at just the right time, his time. It's timely because of man's grievous position as a sinner.

As a sinner. And it is a position of bondage. A position of slavery. Bondage. Bondage to what?

[15:47] Well, he says in verse 3, in bondage under the elements of the world. If you have a New American Standard or ESV, I think maybe even the NIV puts it this way.

It is translated this way, the elemental things of this world. That's rather interesting. What does that mean? Well, first of all, that timely gift of God's Son is what releases us from bondage before we become believers, became believers.

I hope it's past tense for you that you became a believer and are a believer today. Before we became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, we were held under the elemental things of the world.

And what does that mean? Well, these elemental things belong, according to Paul here, they belong to this world. Right? That's the first thing we see and notice and it's rather obvious.

Whatever these elemental things are, they belong to this world. And do not belong to heaven. Paul said the elemental things of the world.

[16:59] So these things are of this world. These things are not of God. But also, you should note what he says here. These elemental things of the world, they hold us in bondage.

We're in bondage to them. Slavery to them. And why is that? Because we're like the children, or again, really the word is infants, that Paul mentions in his illustration in verses 1 and 2.

He begins with an illustration. He's talking about children. He's talking about infants. And so we're in bondage to the elemental things of this world, Paul says, looking at the illustration, because we are like those children, or once were, because of frailty, because of immaturity, because of ignorance. See, a child is no different than a slave. That's what he says in the illustration. A slave who is under the guardians and the masters. But Paul, then Paul's application there in verse 3 is, even so, that is in a similar way, we, when we were children.

So it relates to what we once were. Infants. In a spiritual sense. Weak.

[18:19] Immature. Ignorant. Unable to do for ourselves. It's a description, one of many descriptions in the Bible, of the state of lostness. Condition of lostness.

Like infants. Weak. Immature. Can't do for ourselves. Unable to do for ourselves what needs to be done for ourselves. The most important thing that needs to be done for ourselves. And so he says, we, when we were infants, when we were helpless, we were in bondage to the mastery of those things that belong to this world.

It's a description of losses. But what are these elemental things? Well, the word that he uses here is stoicheion. Stoicheion is the Greek word for it.

And it means basically the ABCs of something. That's what the word stoicheion means. It just means the basic, the ABCs of things. The ABCs.

And so the basic set of rules. Here's the idea. The basic set of rules that determines one's behavior in life.

[19:24] The ABCs over which one's life is governed in terms of way of thinking, conduct, morality. This is what Paul is talking about.

It's a condition of lostness. He refers to this again in verse 9 of the same chapter. He says, but now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements?

Stoicheion, same word. Turn again to those things, to which you desire again to be in bondage. And of course, he's speaking to the Jews here. This is the whole point of the book of Galatians.

So Paul goes on to explain what the ABCs of the world were for the Jews, and for many still living today. He said, you observe days and months and seasons and years.

And so what was it that they were in bondage to? A works salvation. And many are still in bondage to that today. But I want you to understand that Stoicheion, the word that he used here, refers to anything.

[20:32] Anything in this world. The ABCs of anything in this world that holds you in bondage to a certain way of thinking, conduct, morality, whatever.

Whatever is your religion. And everyone has one. Hopefully you have the right one. Of course, the right one is really a relationship, isn't it? And yet many are in bondage, in fact, all other than believers, true believers, are in bondage to the ABCs of this world.

If anyone's religion, and everyone has one, be it religionism or hedonism, many are in bondage to that kind of ABCs of conduct.

Hedonism. That is just the living for the gratification of self and the cravings of the flesh. Or it could be religionism, hedonism, environmentalism.

That's a religion today. Environmentalism, humanism, materialism. I could go on and on with the whole list of isms.

[21:42] Whatever it is. Whatever it is. And the implication is that most people in this world are in bondage to this kind of, these elemental things.

And Paul says, even so we were. Even so we were. And you know, this kind of helps to explain some things, I think. Are you sometimes perplexed and kind of frustrated about people in our world, the way they live, the way they think, and so forth, you know?

The pornographers, the homosexuals, the abortionists, the wacko environmentalists, those devoted to pagan religions, and just to name a few.

Why don't they get it? Ever think that? I just don't understand how they can think that way. Why don't they get it? Why can't they see it? And there is this great divide that we think somehow we can bridge by reason and so forth.

But there's this great divide of ideologies, you know, between true biblical Christianity and really everyone else in the world. And they never, ever seem to come together.

[ 22 : 54 ] It's frustrating, isn't it? And why is that? Why do we sometimes ask ourselves, why can't they just see the truth?

I mean, it's so plain to me. Ever, ever entertain that kind of thought? Well, it is because they are under the bondage of a certain set of ABCs. It governs their way of thinking.

Governs, therefore, their morality. It governs, therefore, their conduct. This is man's grievous position as a sinner. That's what makes this gift so timely.

And the only hope really is man's gracious provision of a Savior. And here's where we get to the gift. And it's a timely gift.

This ultimate gift. Oh, the power of a simple conjunction to relate truth. And we see examples of this all throughout Scripture.

[ 23 : 58 ] But in verse 3, look at it. Even so, we, when we were children, infants, were. We were, like everyone else in the world, in bondage under the elements of the world, the elemental things of the world, the ABCs of this lost world.

But, there's the conjunction. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son. Now, there are three things I want you to see about this timely gift.

This timely gift. Number one, it was the predetermination of God the Father. This gift was given by the predetermination of God the Father.

God did not send forth His Son on some whim as a kind of an afterthought. God did not send forth His Son because, you know, at some point in time He experienced a moment of mercy.

Or, just finally came to the conclusion there was no other way. Oh no. This was all planned. This was all predetermined down to the minutest detail.

[ 25 : 19 ] In fact, the Greek word for time is chronos. You've probably heard that, have heard that term. Chronos. We get our word chronology from it.

But it's time and it refers to an exact point in time, moment in time. Something you can set your watch by.

The word fullness, pleroma, it refers to something made full.

Something made complete. And so you can put all that together and connect it with God in the infinite knowledge of God and according to His predetermined counsel and will.

In eternity past, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in a sense synchronized their watches. Okay. In eternity past.

[ 26 : 22 ] And then they made their plan come about at just the right time. In fact, moving all of history and the world powers and everything, moving them all to bring about the exact right conditions for the coming of the Son.

It's not that God waited for that right condition to take place. It's God determined that everything would be right for the coming of the Son and He moved everything in its place.

Everything in its place. God predetermined to give His Son. You need to understand that. It's not just on the spur of the moment.

Not some afterthought. God predetermined it. And really, according to the Bible, I can trace God's saving grace in my life all the way back into eternity.

That's what Scripture says. Ephesians 1.4 For He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight in love. Ephesians 1.11 In Him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

[ 27 : 39 ] 2 Timothy 1.9 He saved us and called us to a holy calling not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

Romans 8.29 For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And I could go on and on with the passage. The preordination of God the Father when the fullness of time had come not God waiting for that time to come but God determining that time beforehand.

When that time had come God sent forth His Son. Timely. Just at the right time. But a time that He determined.

In eternity past. But second notice the incarnation of God the Son. We're talking about you know this gracious provision of a Savior for us.

[ 28 : 44 ] Think about the incarnation. He says something here about the incarnation of God the Son. Verse 4 God sent forth His Son what? Born of a woman. Born of a woman.

Now there certainly are implications here very clear implications for the virgin conception of Jesus. Virgin conception virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the primary point here is the incarnation of Jesus of Christ. The incarnation. God becoming a man. You see the child of the Virgin Mary and she was a virgin.

The child of the Virgin Mary was birthed in the normal way. In fact you can go back all the way to after the child was conceived because the conception was not normal.

But all the time she carried that precious child in her womb. She carried that precious child in the normal way and experienced all the normal things of carrying a child.

[ 29 : 50 ] And gave birth to that child and it was that child was given birth in the normal way. So everything about the birth of Jesus not his conception but his birth was normal.

And though the child was no normal child. The child of Mary was fully man born in the normal way just like you and me.

but at the same time fully God because that child was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin.

And so the two have to come together and the two are crucial. He had to be fully man in order to represent each of us. Just God himself could not have died on the cross for us.

In the first place God can't die. Now he had to represent us and so God had to become a man. He had to be fully man to represent you and to represent me on that cross.

[ 30 : 57 ] It was the only way it could be done. At the same time he had to be fully God in order for his sacrifice to work. In order for his sacrifice to atone for our sin.

It was the only way it could have been done. And as a man Paul goes on to say he was born under the law. Born under the law just like everyone is born under.

It's a reference clearly to his Jewishness. He was born a Jew under the law. But understand it was that law that held every one of us prisoner.

Because we can't obey it. But Jesus perfectly obeyed the law. Perfectly. In every way. Jesus satisfied all the requirements of God's law.

Every jot and tittle or in our terminology dotted every I and crossed every T. And because he did that he secured and this is the third part of God's gracious provision he secured the redemption and adoption of God's children.

[ 32 : 08 ] This is wonderful. Verse 5 to redeem those who were under the law. See we were under the law. Redeem us that we might receive the adoption of sons.

And this is great. These two things redemption and adoption. What a gift. What an ultimate gift. Redemption and adoption. Now what do these two things mean to us?

Well redeem basically means the word means to pay a ransom price in order to secure someone's freedom. That's exactly what we needed.

And so the word is a very picturesque word. It pictures someone on the slave block. We can kind of picture that. And this person is chained enslaved no freedom cannot do as he wishes go where he wishes his life is in bondage in slavery and then someone comes along and pays for that man's freedom.

Freedom from his old master the elemental things of this world and freed to serve a new master the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 33 : 18 ] You might remember that old old hymn written by Charles Wesley and can it be you probably remember the title but I bet you don't remember some of the words because they're really really old English but listen to some of it.

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood died he died he for me who caused his pain for me who him to death pursued amazing love how can it be that thou my God should die for me I really love the fourth verse long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature's night thine eye diffused a quickening ray I woke the dungeon flamed with light my chains fell off my heart was free I rose went forth and followed thee wonderful and this is what Paul said God sent forth his

son to redeem those in bondage to the law in bondage to it because we cannot keep it and were therefore condemned by it and yet you know it's hard to imagine that anything could be better than that and yet it does get better than that so look what he says next that we might receive the adoption as sons that's icing on the cake when you put your faith in Jesus Christ he not only purchased you off the slave block of sin and futility but then immediately made you a child of God that's different from a slave isn't it a child of God John 1:12 but as many as received him to them he gave the right to become children of God to those who believe in his name who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God born of God because of that not only is this ultimate gift a timely gift but also finally this morning a timeless gift it really is the gift that keeps on giving and we know that don't we I wish we had time to really unwrap this part of the gift but there are two timeless features to this gift if you have received it one of them is assurance and assurance confidence the other is an inheritance an inheritance let's take the first one assurance verse 6 and because you are sons

I love that because you are sons God has sent forth the spirit of his son that's the holy spirit he sent forth the spirit of his son the holy spirit into your hearts crying out Abba father now the term father is familiar it's not hard to understand that word it's a relational term we know what a father is the term Abba is unfamiliar at least in its language it's unfamiliar the word is Aramaic and it just kind of comes right on into the English if you could speak Aramaic that's exactly how you would pronounce it Abba so they don't translate it and so you know if you haven't ever heard of this before or done any study yourself you would look at that Abba what in the world does that mean well it's Aramaic and it's a term of affection and really the only way that we could translate it and probably why the Bible translators did not translate it would be daddy in our culture that's probably how we would translate or papa or dad it's a term of affection and so you see salvation gives this gift gives us an ongoing intimacy with the God of the universe God our father our heavenly father an ongoing intimacy that doesn't end of course when this life ends it goes on into eternity and it gets even sweeter there intimacy with him but here that means that when we suffer suffer affliction we're hurting troubled don't know which way to turn major decision to make we don't know how to make it we're having a hard time maybe suffering a great loss in life or maybe we're struggling with some area of temptation and even have failed him and have sinned against him regardless we have an assurance we have a confidence that we can run to the father our father and say daddy papa please help me it's a term of intimacy endearment that's the gift that just keeps on giving also we have an inheritance an inheritance and this you know this is not only the gift that keeps on giving but it is also a gift where the larger part of it we have yet to receive we only have a small part of it now and it's great now but there's a whole lot more to come and it's waiting for us in heaven [39:20] Romans 8:15 for you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear but you received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out Abba father the spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children what then then heirs heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ this is almost inconceivable incomprehensible that by giving ourselves in faith to Jesus Christ God gives us everything his son possesses and that's how could you even put a value on that it really is as Paul said in another place an unspeakable gift really untraceable indescribable incomprehensible gift amen for to to to

Thank you.